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Governor and Mrs. Blagojevich, Chancellor Simon, and Academy Officers, Regents, Trustees, Rectors, Convocation Committee Members, Laureates Past and Present, Family, Friends:

I am deeply honored and deeply grateful to be here this evening. For one thing, clergy don't ordinarily get to dress up like this and enjoy an elegant evening on Saturday night. (We're inclined to more mundane matters.)

I am deeply honored to be among such distinguished company: my fellow 2007 Laureates and all the wonderful Lincoln

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Laureates. When I circulated the list of current and former Laureates to my five children to show them the kind of company their father was keeping these days, they were impressed. "That's great Dad" they said. "It's the only time in your life you'll get to be in a club with Ernie Banks, Walter Payton, and Jackie Joyner- Kersee."

All five are all great athletes, great parents, great human beings. I am deeply proud of them and grateful for their presence this evening from

far and wide with the exception of the youngest who is in San Diego tending to a new baby daughter — our 13th grandchild.

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None of us comes to this honor alone. And I am more grateful than I can say to my wife — my partner, my love, Sue: and to my brother and friends who have honored me by their presence here.

I am here because it is my great privilege to be the pastor of the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago, an extraordinary community of faithful people. The church has been on Michigan Avenue since 1914 and part of the life of the city for decades before that. It is a church that cares for children, bringing four hundred youngsters from Cabrini Green and other urban neighborhoods to the church for an

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hour and a half of academic tutoring weekly: a church that cares for the homeless and destitute, the hungry and the elderly. It is a church that is lively, creative and intentionally inclusive. It is a religious institution that calls itself and strives to be a Light in the City, and I am deeply proud and profoundly

grateful to have been associated with it for twenty-one years.

The recognition tonight is a particular honor for me because I grew up in a home that valued books, reading, literature and, above all, history. My father, a Pennsylvania Railroad Engineer, loved Abraham Lincoln, read Carl Sandburg, told me Lincoln stories, took me to Gettysburg and showed me the

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cemetery where the Address was delivered, and so I have inherited my own fascination.

We Presbyterians claim him. He never formally joined a church, but he was inclined toward Presbyterianism.

His parents were Separate Baptists but when he settled in Springfield Lincoln started tilting in our direction. Mary Lincoln joined the First Presbyterian Church of Springfield: the pastor, James Smith, conducted Eddie's funeral in 1850 and baptized Tad in 1856. In Washington, the Lincolns attended the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, rented a pew for $50

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per year and were a regular part of the Sunday morning congregation. The minister, Phineas Gurley, was a significant part of Lincoln's life, as Professor David Donald, a fellow Laureate, recounts in his extraordinary biography — which is on my bookshelf, by the way.

Lincoln listened to Gurley's sermons throughout the Civil War. Gurley officiated at Willie's funeral, prayed at the bedside of the dying President, and preached the funeral sermon at the Executive Mansion.

More important than his denominational preference, however, is Lincoln's own spirit and his deep, and relevant, notion of the role of religion in a free society.

Reinhold Niebuhr, perhaps the most important religious thinker of the 20th century, was a great admirer of Lincoln. He said once that "Lincoln's religious convictions were superior in depth and purity to those held by the religious as well as the political leaders of the day" (White).

Scholars continue to study Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address,

not only for its stunning literacy, but its theological importance. Frederick Douglas said about

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it, “The address sounded more like a sermon than a state paper.”

Consider these amazing words:

> **“Both (referring to the Union and the Confederacy) read the same Bible, and pray to the same God: and each invokes his aid against the other . . . The prayers of both could not be answered: that of neither has been answered fully.”**

Historian Ronald White says that Lincoln was inveighing against a tribal God who would take the side of one party against another, and building a case of an inclusive God.

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I can’t think of more important words in a time when religion is used for partisan political purposes, used as a weapon in ideological conflict, co-opted, of all things, to rationalize, justify, and inspire violence.

I don’t know of more relevant words for the nation — for all of us to ponder, than these, which he spoke 142 years ago almost to the day.

“With malice toward none: with charity for all: with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and

his orphan — to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting, peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.”

Again, thank you for listening to me, and for this honor.